

**Statement of the Honorable W.J. "Billy" Tauzin, Chairman
Subcommittee on Telecommunications, Trade, and Consumer Protection**

Hearing on

Reauthorization of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

May 22, 1997

This hearing of the Subcommittee on Telecommunications, Trade, and Consumer Protection will come to order.

Three weeks ago, this Subcommittee held an informative hearing on air bags where Dr. Martinez, administrator of NHTSA, along with industry and consumer representatives, told us and the American consumer how best to protect themselves and their children from the injuries associated with air bag deployments. This hearing is one of the best examples of my first two goals for any hearing: education for Members of Congress and our constituents.

My second two goals identification of problems and proposed solutions are highlighted in today's hearing. Our last hearing had a narrow focus; today's hearing is a good deal broader, focusing on the future of America's automobile safety agency.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration was last reauthorized in the 1991 highway bill, referred to commonly as ISTEA. That authorization expired at the end of fiscal year 1995. As we prepare to reauthorize the agency, perhaps into the next century, we find ourselves in a situation where consumers increasingly place a premium on automobile safety and are demonstrating those preferences with their checkbook. As an authorizing committee, we need to ask ourselves whether this agency is serving those consumers well and what areas, if any, need to be improved.

The Administration has put their own plan for NHTSA reauthorization forward as an add-on to their highway reauthorization effort, entitled "NEXTEA." This legislation contains proposals on a wide variety of issues, from changes in routine reporting requirements to creating a uniform system of titling for salvage vehicles similar to that proposed by Mr. White last year.

And I know that both domestic and international manufacturers have their own concerns, as do those who speak for the safety community. And others will have praise for some of NHTSA's ongoing efforts. I think that this will provide for a fruitful exchange, and one that will serve to inform the Members of this Subcommittee as we go forward with the important work of reauthorizing this agency.

The basic question that I would put forth to everyone testifying today, including the Administration, is this: If you were reauthorizing NHTSA, what would you put in the bill? As all of us try to respond to that question, we need to evaluate some important issues, such as:

How can we best ensure that NHTSA fulfills its number one priority, saving lives on America's highways?

Are we doing enough to make sure that consumers have all of the information that they need to make informed decisions about their cars and their safety? And,

Are we unintentionally distracting the Agency, manufacturers and others from their primary goal—making safer cars—by imposing mandates that ultimately have very little to do with safety?

These are just some of the questions that we need to work through. Our witnesses will provide us with others. I look forward to working with all of our witnesses today to try and formulate some answers to these difficult questions.

Thank you.